

country. He urged us to put politics aside.

That is what Senator TESTER and Senator GILLIBRAND and Senator ISAKSON have asked us to do. Last year, we introduced the Blue Water Navy Vietnam Veterans Act, which would guarantee that all Vietnam veterans exposed to toxic Agent Orange chemicals have equal access to the care and benefits they have earned.

A number of us, myself included, raised the issue with VA Secretary Wilkie, both in private meetings in our office and in the Veterans' Affairs Committee, pressing him to expand benefits to all veterans.

Mr. Kvintus and Mr. Benedict and all of the veterans in our States—Georgia, Connecticut, Montana, New York, and Ohio—we all hear this. We all know that these veterans put themselves in harm's way. It is the cost of war.

We need to show the American people we can work together. We should start by putting partisanship aside, passing this bill tonight, and finally getting the care for veterans that they deserve.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Connecticut.

Mr. BLUMENTHAL. Mr. President, I want to thank my colleagues Senator BROWN, Senator TESTER, most importantly, Senator GILLIBRAND, and our good friend Senator ISAKSON.

Senator ISAKSON and Senator GILLIBRAND and I worked together closely on this issue when I was the ranking member of the Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee. We engaged the VA through hearings, through meetings, through any way that we could reach the VA so that it would grant the presumption to all veterans who served in the territorial waters of Vietnam during the Vietnam war and were exposed to Agent Orange, to give them simple justice, and to treat them with the same presumption of service-connected disability as their fellow veterans who served in the Vietnam conflict with boots on the ground. If they served in those territorial waters, they deserve that same presumption.

Beyond the abstraction here, I want to talk about the face and voice of this problem, which, for me, is my good friend Gerry Wright.

Gerry Wright rode across this country on a motorcycle. The mantra on the motorcycle was "Sprayed and Betrayed." Gerry Wright is a victim of Agent Orange. He suffers from some of the same conditions as those brave veterans who served with boots on the ground. He joined me, along with Paul Scappaticci, Cynthia Johnson, and Gary Monk on Veterans Day. Just as he rode across the country, we came together to raise awareness about this issue.

If Americans saw and heard those faces and voices, if my colleagues heeded their call, there would be no objection in this body to this legislation. It is all of us who share a responsibility, and it is the VA that has to acknowl-

edge responsibility, as well, for its opposition over the years and its actions blocking simple justice for these veterans.

In the absence of justice from the VA, we have fought over these years—just as the blue water Navy veterans have fought for decades—to achieve that justice, and 5 months ago, that justice seemed within reach when the House unanimously passed, 382 to 0, the Blue Water Navy Vietnam Veterans Act.

The Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee held a hearing on this legislation in August. Members had more than sufficient time to consider the language. There are more than ample funds to cover it. There is no reason—none whatsoever—for delaying this legislation, which has such broad support from the Veterans Service Organizations, stakeholders, and members of this body.

I want to remind my colleagues that this legislation also includes a provision that I led with Senator MORAN and Senator TESTER that would treat with fairness our Korean veterans. It is called the Fairness for Korean DMZ Veterans Act, ensuring all veterans who served in the Korean DMZ, when Agent Orange was used there, that they will also receive the healthcare and benefits they deserve. This measure is about justice for our Vietnam veterans, for our Korean war veterans, and it is a symbol, as well as a tangible and profoundly significant benefit of our commitment to cover the cost of war. This measure is not about a gift. It is not about charity. It is about what we owe the veteran. It is about keeping faith, making sure that we leave none of those veterans behind, and that we give them the simple justice they deserve. They have fought for this recognition over years, and "sprayed and betrayed" will be the appropriate designation if we fail in this duty for them.

Again, I thank Senator GILLIBRAND and Senator DAINES for their leadership, and I urge my colleagues to support this measure.

I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The senior assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

LEGISLATIVE SESSION

MORNING BUSINESS

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate proceed to legislative session for a period of morning business, with Senators permitted to speak for up to 10 minutes each.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

70TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE UNIVERSAL DECLARATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS

Mr. LEAHY. Mr. President, in 1948, in the wake of two World Wars that caused death, destruction and atrocities on a massive and unprecedented scale, the world came together at the nascent United Nations to establish the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

These rights, envisioned as the "foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world," included article 19, the right of everyone to freedom of opinion and expression. This, of course, mirrors our First Amendment, which for more than two centuries has served as the cornerstone of our democracy. Article 19 also includes the ability to "receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers," as necessary to the realization of that right. The free and independent press has fulfilled this essential role around the world ever since.

Today is the 70th anniversary of that landmark declaration; yet as we commemorate that historic achievement, I have never been more concerned about the state of freedom of the press. Increasingly, around the world and even here in the United States, governments are actively trying to intimidate and silence the independent media. This year alone, according to the Committee to Protect Journalists, over 43 journalists have been murdered for nothing more than publishing facts and informing the public. Countless others have been harassed and threatened. President Trump, who has called the press an "enemy of the people" and routinely denigrates journalists who do not portray him in a favorable light, has inspired the world's autocrats to decry "fake news" and imprison and even assassinate journalists who courageously report on corruption and other government misconduct.

Eleanor Roosevelt, one of our country's greatest defenders of human rights, served as chairwoman of the UN commission that wrote the Universal Declaration. Its commitment to the "inherent dignity" and "equal and inalienable rights" of all people is a testament to her vision of a more humane, just, and peaceful world, but like any such statement of principles, the declaration is aspirational. It has tangible meaning only to the extent that people apply it in practice. As the oldest democracy whose First Amendment has inspired countless people on every continent, it is incumbent on us all to defend the right of free expression enshrined in article 19 of the Universal Declaration, here and around the world.

GOVERNMENT FUNDING

Mr. VAN HOLLEN. Mr. President, last week the Senate passed a second continuing resolution for fiscal year 2019, providing short-term funding for